

WIN

Weight-control Information Network

Tips to Help You Get Active



U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
National Institutes of Health



Tips to Help You Get Active



You know that physical activity is good for you. So what is stopping you from getting out there and getting at it? Maybe you think that working out is boring, joining a gym is costly, or doing one more thing during your busy day is impossible. Physical activity can be part of your daily life. This booklet can help you get moving by offering ideas to beat your roadblocks to getting active.

Why should I be physically active?

You may know that regular physical activity can help you control your weight. But do you know why? Physical activity burns calories. When you burn more calories than you eat each day, you will take off pounds. You can also avoid gaining weight by balancing the number of calories you burn with the number of calories you eat.

Some people are active every day. You see them walking through your neighborhood, carrying a gym bag to work, or running around the park. How do people make regular physical activity a part of their lives? Throughout this booklet you will hear from people who have done it. Maybe their stories will inspire you.



Regular physical activity may also help prevent or delay the onset of chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and colon cancer. If you have one of these health problems, physical activity may improve your condition.* Regular physical activity may also increase your energy and boost your mood.

** If you are a man and over age 40 or a woman and over age 50, or have a chronic health problem, talk to your health care provider before starting a **vigorous** physical activity program. You do not need to talk to your provider before starting an activity like walking.*

What is standing in my way?

Would you like to do more physical activity but do not know how to make it a part of your life? This booklet describes some common barriers to physical activity and ways to overcome them. After you read them, try writing down the top two or three barriers that you face on pages 13 and 14. Then write down solutions that you think will work for you. You **can** make regular physical activity a part of your life!

Can you use any of these ideas to become more physically active?

Personal Barriers

Barrier: Between work, family, and other demands, I am too busy to exercise.

Solutions: **Make physical activity a priority.** Carve out some time each week to be active and put it on your calendar. Try waking up a half-hour earlier to walk, scheduling lunchtime workouts, or taking an evening fitness class.



Build physical activity into your routine chores. Rake the yard, wash the car, or do energetic housework. That way you do what needs to get done and move around too.

Make family time physically active. Plan a weekend hike through a park, family softball game, or an evening walk around the block.

Barrier: By the end of a long day, I am just too tired to work out.

Solutions: **Break your workout into three 10-minute segments each day.** Taking three short walks during the day may seem easier and less tiring than one 30-minute workout, and is just as good for you.

Find another time during the day to work out. If evening workouts are not for you, then try a bike ride before breakfast or a walk at lunchtime.

Sneak physical activity into your days.

Take stairs instead of elevators, park further away in parking lots, and walk in place while watching TV.

Barrier:

I think my weight is fine, so I am not motivated to exercise.

Solutions:

Think about the other health benefits of physical activity.

Regular physical activity may help lower cholesterol and blood pressure, and lower your odds of having heart disease, type 2 diabetes, or cancer. Research shows that people who are overweight, active, and fit live longer than people who are not overweight but are inactive, and unfit. Also, physical activity may lift your mood and increase your energy level.

Do it just for fun. Play a team sport, work in a garden, or learn a new dance and make getting fit something fun.

Train for a charity event. You can work to help others while you work out.



Barrier:

Getting on a treadmill or stationary bike is boring.

Solutions:

Mac in Tucson, Arizona, says, "I would take walks in the morning and see a lot of birds. Now I bring my camera along and get some great shots of birds. Taking pictures makes walking more fun. I don't get bored. I mail my pictures to my grandson and he enjoys them."

Meet a friend for workouts. If your buddy is on the next bike or treadmill, your workout will be less boring.

Watch TV or listen to music or a book on tape while you walk or pedal indoors. Check out music or books on tape from your local library.

Get outside. A change in scenery can relieve your boredom.

If you are riding a bike outside, be sure to wear a helmet and learn safe rules of the road. For more information about bike safety, read *Bike Safety Tips* from the American Academy of Family Physicians (<http://familydoctor.org/692.xml>).



Barrier: I am afraid I will hurt myself.

Solutions:

Start slowly. If you are starting a new physical activity program, go slow at the start. Even if you are doing an activity that you once did well, start up again slowly to lower your risk of injury or burnout.

Choose moderate-intensity physical activities. You are not likely to hurt yourself by walking 30 minutes per day. Doing vigorous physical activities may increase your risk for injury, but moderate-intensity physical activity is low risk.

Take a class. A knowledgeable group fitness instructor should be able to teach you how to move with proper form and lower risk for injury. The instructor can watch your actions during class and let you know if you are doing things right.

Choose water workouts. Whether you swim laps or try water aerobics, working out in the water is easy on your joints and helps reduce sore muscles and injury.

Work with a personal trainer. A certified personal trainer should be able to show you how to warm up, cool down, use fitness equipment like treadmills and weight-training machines, and use proper form to help lower



your risk for injury. Personal training sessions may be cheap or costly, so find out about fees before making an appointment.

Barrier:

I have never been into sports.

Solutions:

Find a physical activity that you enjoy. You do not have to be an athlete to benefit from physical activity. Try yoga, hiking, or planting a garden.

Choose an activity that you can stick with, like walking. Just put one foot in front of the other. Use the time you spend walking to relax, talk with a friend or family member, or just enjoy the scenery.



Barrier:

I do not want to spend a lot of money to join a gym or buy workout gear.

Solutions:

Choose free activities. Garden, take your children to the park to play, lift plastic milk jugs filled with water or sand, or take a walk.

Find out if your job offers any discounts on memberships. Some companies get lower membership rates at fitness or community centers. Other companies will even pay for part of an employee's membership fee.



Check out your local recreation or community center. These centers may cost less than other gyms, fitness centers, or health clubs.

Choose physical activities that do not require any special gear. Walking requires only a pair of sturdy shoes. To dance, just turn on some music.

Barrier:

I do not have anyone to watch my kids while I work out.

Solutions:

Do something physically active with your kids. Kids need physical activity too. No matter what age your kids are, you can find an activity you can do together. Dance to music, take a walk, run around the park, or play basketball or soccer together.

Take turns with another parent to watch the kids. One of you minds the kids while the other one works out.

Hire a baby-sitter.

Look for a fitness or community center that offers childcare. Centers that have childcare are becoming more popular. Cost and quality vary, so get all the information up front.



John from Chicago says, "When I moved to Chicago, I joined a basketball team that some people in my office put together. It's been great for building relationships with co-workers and getting rid of stress. We are all of different ages and abilities, but we are competitive too. It is social and fun."

Barrier: My family and friends are not physically active.

Solutions: **Do not let that stop you. Do it for yourself.**

Enjoy the rewards—such as better sleep, a happier mood, more energy, and a stronger body—you get from working out.

Join a class or sports league where people count on you to show up. If your basketball team or dance partner counts on you, you will not want to miss a workout, even if your family and friends are not involved.



Barrier: I would be embarrassed if my neighbors or friends saw me exercising.

Solutions: **Ask yourself if it really matters.** You are doing something positive for your health and that is something to be proud of. You may even inspire others to get physically active too.

Invite a friend or neighbor to join you. You may feel less self-conscious if you are not alone.

Go to a park, nature trail, or fitness or community center to be physically active.

Place Barriers

Barrier: My neighborhood does not have sidewalks.

Solutions:



Find a safe place to walk. Instead of walking in the street, walk in a friend or family member's neighborhood that has sidewalks. Walk during your lunch break at work. Find out if you can walk at a local school track.

Work out in the yard. Do yard work or wash the car. These count as physical activity too.

Barrier: The winter is too cold/summer is too hot to be active outdoors.

Solutions:

Walk around the mall.

Join a fitness or community center. Find one that lets you pay only for the months or classes you want, instead of the whole year.

Exercise at home. Work out to fitness videos or DVDs. Check a different one out from the library each week for variety.



Jennifer from Detroit says, "I needed to find something to do to keep off the extra 5 pounds I gain every winter. I didn't feel like doing anything after work, when it is already dark. So, I started working out at a fitness center near my office at lunchtime. I do the treadmill and lift weights 3 days a week. It makes me feel great. Also, I don't pay for my membership during the summer, when I'd rather be outside."

Barrier: I do not feel safe exercising by myself.

Solutions: **Join or start a walking group.** You can enjoy added safety and company as you walk.



Take an exercise class at a nearby fitness or community center.

Work out at home. You don't need a lot of space. Turn on the radio and dance or follow along with a fitness show on TV.

Health Barriers

Barrier:

I have a health problem (diabetes, heart disease, asthma, arthritis) that I do not want to make worse.

Solutions:

Talk with your health care professional.

Most health problems are helped by physical activity. Find out what physical activities you can safely do and follow advice about length and intensity of workouts.

Start slowly. Take it easy at first and see how you feel before trying more challenging workouts. Stop if you feel out of breath, dizzy, faint, or nauseated, or if you have pain.



Barrier:

I have an injury and do not know what physical activities, if any, I can do.

Solutions:

Talk with your health care professional.

Ask your physician or physical therapist about what physical activities you can safely perform. Follow advice about length and intensity of workouts.

Start slowly. Take it easy at first and see how you feel before trying more challenging workouts. Stop if you feel pain.



Work with a personal trainer. A knowledgeable personal trainer should be able to help you design a fitness plan around your injury.

What can I do to break through my roadblocks?

What are the top two or three roadblocks to physical activity that you face? What can you do to break through these barriers? Use this space to write down the barriers you face and solutions you can use to overcome them.



Barrier 1: _____

Solutions: _____



Barrier 2: _____

Solutions: _____



Barrier 3: _____

Solutions: _____

1

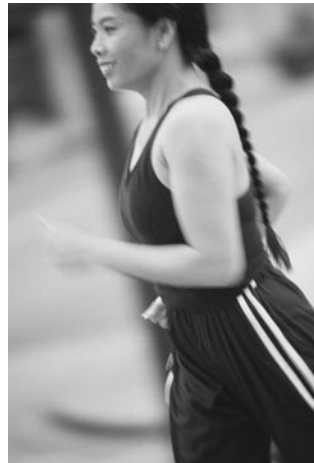
What's next?

You have thought about ways to beat your roadblocks to physical activity. Now, create your road map for adding physical activity to your days in the following three steps.

Know your goal.

Set up short-term goals, like walking 10 minutes a day, 3 days a week, and try to build up to at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days of the week—or preferably, every day of the week. Moderate-intensity physical activity makes you breathe harder, but you should still have enough breath to carry on a conversation. You may need to be physically active for more than 30 minutes a day to help you lose and keep off extra weight.

Track your progress by writing down your goals and what you have done each day, including the type of activity and how long you spent doing it. Seeing your progress in black-and-white can help keep you motivated.



2

See your health care provider if necessary.

If you are a man and over age 40 or a woman and over age 50, or have a chronic health problem such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, or obesity, talk to your health care provider before starting a vigorous physical activity program. You do not need to talk to your provider before starting an activity like walking.

3

Answer questions about how physical activity will fit into your life.

Think about answers to the following four questions. You can write your answers down on page 18 or on another sheet of paper. Your answers will be your road map to your physical activity program.

What physical activities will you do? List the activities you would like to do, such as walking, energetic yard work or housework, joining a sports league, exercising with a video, dancing, swimming, bicycling, or taking a class at a fitness or community center. Think about sports or other activities that you enjoyed doing when you were younger. Could you enjoy one of these activities again?





When will you be physically active? List the days and times you could do each activity on your list, such as first thing in the morning, during lunch break from work, after dinner, or on Saturday afternoon. Look at your calendar or planner to find the days and times that work best.



Who will remind you to get off the couch?

List the people—your spouse, sibling, parent, or friends—who can support your efforts to become physically active. Give them ideas about how they could be supportive, like offering encouraging words, watching your kids, or working out with you.



When will you start your physical activity program? Set a date when you will start getting active. The date might be the first meeting of an exercise class you have signed up for, or a date you will meet a friend for a walk. Write the date on your calendar. Then stick to it. Before you know it, physical activity will become a regular part of your life.

What physical activities will you do?

When will you be physically active?

Who will remind you to get off the couch?

When will you start your physical activity program?

Additional Resources

For more ideas about how physical activity can help you control your weight, read WIN's fact sheet **Physical Activity and Weight Control**.

If you are looking for tips about eating well and adding physical activity to your life, read **Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan: Tips for Adults** from WIN. Available in English and Spanish.

For tips about starting a walking program, read **Walking . . . A Step in the Right Direction** from WIN. Available in English and Spanish. To find out about walking groups in your area, visit the American Volkssport Association's website at www.ava.org. If you are already the member of a walking group, you may be interested to learn about America on the Move, a national initiative that encourages active living and healthy eating. Information for walking groups is posted on the initiative's website at www.americaonthemove.org.

If you are a very large person and want to get fit, read **Active at Any Size** from WIN.

Weight-control Information Network

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Publications produced by WIN are reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts. This publication was also reviewed by Steven Blair, P.E.D., President and Chief Executive Officer, Cooper Institute; John Jakicic, Ph.D., Chair, Department of Health and Physical Activity and Director, Physical Activity and Weight Management Research Center, University of Pittsburgh; and David Kelley, M.D., Professor of Medicine and Director, Obesity and Nutrition Research Center, University of Pittsburgh.

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